

Reading Guide for *The Cactus Plot*

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1. Who is your favorite character? What characteristics and actions of that character resonate with you?
2. Millie is a newcomer to New Mexico and the Bureau of Land Management agency. What marks Millie as a newcomer? What helps Millie “blend in” and be accepted?
3. How does Millie’s upbringing and outlook on life compare to Ben’s?
4. The characters (Buddy, Cowboy, Belva, Fritz, Ben) that Millie meets while working in the field represent different uses of BLM public land. What are these uses and what perspectives do these characters bring to the story?
5. How does Millie’s image of herself change through the summer? How do you think her family will view Millie when she returns to New Jersey after the field season?
6. Two characters appear to be one thing in the beginning of the story, then later another side of their personality surfaces. Were there hints about their dual character? Where?
7. When Millie first meets BLM Area Manager, Wirt Hernshaw, he describes BLM as the “land nobody wanted,” but now it’s the land everybody wants. (p. 17) He says that areas with timber went to the National Forest Service, scenic areas went to the National Park Service, and BLM got the left-over land. Does this match your experience in visiting these public lands?
8. Because the Bureau of Land Management is referred to as a multiple use agency, Area Manager Wirt describes his job as a balancing act. (pages 25-26). What examples of multiple use does Millie encounter?
9. Wirt expects political pushback when an application to drill a well near the cactus plot Millie found is delayed. What considerations will come into play as this situation unfolds?
10. One aspect of diversity is ethnicity. In addition to ethnicity, in what other ways are the characters diverse? (consider gender, careers, age, backgrounds)
11. When Millie first meets Fritz at his camper, they talk about their childhood images of the West. (p 103) How were their early impressions formed, and how did they change?
12. What did you learn about the people and environment of *The Cactus Plot’s* setting in northwest New Mexico?